



## A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

### *Reporting on the Flu: Who, When, Where*

*Update: Influenza Activity — United States, September 30–December 1, 2007*

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*[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.*

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly broadcast of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Matthew Reynolds. Nobody wants to get the flu and just about everyone has unpleasant memories of getting really sick with the flu. It can be a serious illness and it's important to do what we can to prevent the spread of the flu. Dr. Anthony Fiore, a flu specialist with CDC, is here to tell us about what we're seeing so far with flu in the United States. Welcome to the show, Dr. Fiore.

**[Dr. Fiore]** Thank you.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Dr. Fiore, let's start at the beginning. What's the difference between the flu and having a cold – and is that difference important?

**[Dr. Fiore]** The difference is important for several reasons. One is that we prevent the flu with vaccines and we can also treat the flu with anti-virals. Influenza tends to be a more serious illness than a garden variety sort of cold.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** So, how would you describe the differences between the two?

**[Dr. Fiore]** Influenza will typically have a sudden onset with fever and cough, and often people will have a great deal of fatigue and muscle aches and often need to either skip work or school for a few days.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Where as with a cold, the symptoms may not be as severe?

**[Dr. Fiore]** That's generally true, although of course, colds can be sometimes severe and influenza can also be sometimes fairly mild.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** So, regardless of whether or not you think you have the flu or a cold, you should consult your health care provider?

**[Dr. Fiore]** That's reasonable and that's especially important. If you are prone to the complications of influenza, for example elderly persons or very young children should consult a health care provider to see whether they have the flu and whether there might be something you can do about it, such as get an anti-viral medication.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Let's say you see your health care provider, they diagnose you with having the flu. How are they usually treated?

**[Dr. Fiore]** Well, some people won't require treatment at all or will present to their health care provider too late to get effective treatment, but there are influenza anti-viral medications, one of which is inhaled, the other which can be taken as a pill.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** So the sooner you seek treatment, the more effective the medications could be in reversing the symptoms?

**[Dr. Fiore]** That's absolutely true. The best data that we have shows that treatment is most effective when it's begun within 48 hours of the onset of the symptoms and the sooner the better.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** What trends are you seeing in the 2007-2008 flu season?

**[Dr. Fiore]** Thus far, it's been fairly slow, but this is pretty typical for this time of year. Early December 2007 we're seeing local activity in the United States in a couple of states but overall, generally, activity remains low. We typically see the peak activity early in the New Year, in January or February and we'll see if that holds true this season.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** I know the flu can be quite serious. Are there specific people or circumstances that put people at higher risk of getting the flu?

**[Dr. Fiore]** Well, certainly, there are a number of risk factors for getting more severe flu. Some of these are based on age - persons - elderly persons over the age of 65, and particularly those in nursing homes, are prone to severe flu. And also young children, particularly those under the age of two are at higher risk of being hospitalized with influenza. But anyone with a chronic illness is also at higher risk of flu complications.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** For those people, I'm assuming then, that you would recommend a flu shot to help prevent the onset of flu during the flu season?

**[Dr. Fiore]** Absolutely. At this point, about 72% of the U.S. population has a recommendation for getting a flu vaccine, either because they're elderly or because they're under the age of five or because they have a chronic medical condition that makes them more prone to complications. Or another big group of people is people who come into contact with those above groups, and these folks should get a flu shot to help protect the more vulnerable.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Are there some people who should avoid getting a flu shot or not get one at all?

**[Dr. Fiore]** No, really, the flu shot is a good idea for anyone who wants to avoid the complications of the flu. There are unusual circumstances - persons who have certain neurologic illnesses, like Guillain-Barré's sometimes are advised not to get a flu shot, and also children under the age of six months of age can't get a flu shot, but otherwise, most people are eligible to get a flu shot.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** I hear this come up every year - every flu season. Someone will say, "Well, I'm not going to get a flu shot because I'm concerned that I can get the flu from it." What's your response to that?

**[Dr. Fiore]** Well, there have been a number of studies that have shown that that's not the case. I think what confuses people is sometimes people get flu shots right at the beginning of the respiratory virus season, which is in the fall and winter, and so just by coincidence, they pick up a respiratory virus right about the same time they're getting their shot. But it's not related to the shot. You can't get the flu from the flu shot and you won't get influenza from the inter-nasal vaccine either.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Well, it's December 2007 right now. Is it too late this year – in this flu season - to get the flu shot?

**[Dr. Fiore]** No, it's not. As I mentioned before, December we typically don't see a lot of activity in the United States and the flu activity doesn't peak until January-February. There's still plenty of time to get a shot that would protect you against that time of peak activity.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** If I get a flu shot this year, do I need to get one again next year – next flu season?

**[Dr. Fiore]** Yes, you do, and that's because influenza's unique in that it changes its composition frequently in such a way that you need a new flu shot each year. The flu shot is specially designed to work against the strains that are most recently circulating in the United States. So people who are advised to get a flu shot should do it every year and not expect to get significant protection from a shot that they got in a previous season.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Where can our listeners go to get more information about influenza?

**[Dr. Fiore]** Well, the CDC influenza website is a wonderful source of information. You can get all sorts of things, including information about influenza activity in your region of the country, information about influenza vaccine effectiveness and safety, and also information about the anti-viral drugs which can be used to treat influenza.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** And that site is [cdc.gov/flu](http://cdc.gov/flu)?

**[Dr. Fiore]** That's correct.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Well, Dr. Fiore, thanks so much for taking the time to talk with us today.

**[Dr. Fiore]** It was a pleasure to be on the program.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Well, that's it for this week's show. Don't forget to join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Matthew Reynolds for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

*[Announcer] To access the most accurate and relevant health information that affects you, your family and your community, please visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*